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The future of law, in a weekend

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A couple of weekends ago, I attended the [LawWithoutWalls \(LWOW\) Kick-Off meeting at Harvard Law School \(http://lawwithoutwalls.org/2017-lwow-o-kickoff\)](http://lawwithoutwalls.org/2017-lwow-o-kickoff). LWOW’s tagline is “The Future of Law, Today” and let me just say that with LWOW I’ve seen the future of legal education or really, the future of the legal workplace. And it’s amazing.

I’m a dude who speaks and writes about the future of law often. Those conversations feature everything from the ubiquity of legal information and forms on the internet to machine learning, artificial intelligence, and robot

lawyers. While those topics are fun and sexy, much of that discussion ends up being speculative – “Will AI ever be smart enough to do legal analysis?” “Will people want to use a robot lawyer?” “What do trust and intermediaries look like in a blockchain inundated world?” In contrast, the future of law as portrayed by LWOW is immediate, obvious, and research-based. LWOW is talking about the future of law that will most certainly happen. Not the one that might.

Many economic, sociological, and, yes, technological forces are shaping our lives today. LWOW checks all these boxes. LWOW is a team-based program in which team members identify a problem related to law and create a business plan for a solution over a four-month period. LWOW is a part virtual, part in-person program designed to equip participants with the skills to make them more successful global business leaders in the evolving legal market. LWOW gives participants real-life tools to put into practice, tools often not taught in legal textbooks or classrooms.

Multi-disciplinary

Problem-solving of the near future is and will likely continue to be multi-disciplinary. The deep specialization that schools have encouraged students to develop over the last half-century will continue to be necessary because of the world’s problems, and particularly problems in the modern economy, are increasingly complex. However, this complexity is not always limited to one discipline. Far from it. Specialists must also be fluent in a wider variety of disciplines in order to identify the one discipline appropriate for the problem, recruit the correct person to solve it, and/or troubleshoot it themselves.

LWOW is multidisciplinary, combining students from law and business schools and mentors from across the professional and technology landscape to foster cross-disciplinary collaboration and project development. The Kick-Off event itself included discussions of everything from branding and marketing to understanding technology to giving effective and impactful presentations.

It gave you real-life tools to put into practice, tools often not taught in textbooks or in the classroom.

Diverse

Today's research is showing over and over that diverse teams perform better (<http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>) financially and are smarter. This is great news because the modern world is increasingly diverse due to migration, the relative low cost of long-distance travel, and technological interconnectedness. Beyond that, women are playing an increasingly prominent role (<https://www.credit-suisse.com/us/en/about-us/media/news/articles/media-releases/2012/07/en/42035.html>) both in the workplace and in the legal sector. The modern worker must be comfortable interacting with a wide variety of people from different geographic, family, gender, political and/or faith-based backgrounds.

LWOW is diverse, with 100 students from 30 law and business schools around the world. The group I spent time with had every continent except Antarctica represented, with a variety of lifestyles and, more significantly, ages represented. LWOW directly addresses the need for lawyers to have the “people skills” to enable them to work well with a diverse group of people. An entire day was dedicated to encouraging group members to “break down walls” between them and better understand others’ points of view and how to work with them in high-pressure real-life situations.

Entrepreneurial

Today, the average worker will change jobs 12 times during their career, and four times before he/she is 32 years old. Looking specifically at the legal sector, lawyers are facing a radically changing landscape with low-cost outsourced providers, technology, demanding and sophisticated clients, and newly launched providers of legal services. As modern day employees, lawyers are going to have to flex an entrepreneurial muscle group that they've traditionally ignored.

LWOW encourages entrepreneurship by not only teaching participants a creative methodology but by encouraging them to apply it immediately and liberally to a topic that's broad yet acutely relevant to today's changing legal market. But the process doesn't stop there. At the end of the four-month process, LWOW teams much pitch their idea to a *Shark Tank*-like panel of judges that includes venture capitalists and real-life stakeholders.

The panel will very directly and sometimes pointedly critique the originality of the team's idea, the rigor with which they pursued the idea, and its viability as a standalone business or endeavor. Here is just one of a multitude of success stories: I met a young lawyer and LWOW alum who is pursuing a very interesting career helping large law firms enter and adapt to the South and Central American legal market. He said that he would have never had the confidence to pursue this path if it hadn't been for his experience in LWOW.

This is the main reason I love LWOW. I see the future of the legal sector as much more interesting and provocative than the past (or, frankly, the present). In LWOW, law students work collaboratively and creatively to solve real problems in the law – and they have to make their solutions work from a business point of view.

Opinions about the future are in large supply, especially those that engage sexy or provocative ideas about robot lawyers or artificial intelligence. Fewer are those that engage the more realistic but harder to grapple with shorter-term and more likely future. Even fewer are those who *do* something about it. This puts LWOW – a program that not only talks about, not only does something, but that trains students for the immediate future – in rarefied air not only in legal education but in all legal.

I saw the future of legal education and career development last weekend. The future's bright.

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About Dan Lear

Dan Lear is a lawyer, blogger and legal industry gadfly. As a technology-focused business lawyer, Dan advised companies from startups to the Fortune 100, helping to develop agreements and terms for early cloud services offerings well before "the cloud" was an everyday norm. In 2014, Dan joined Avvo, an online legal marketplace, where he is the Director of Industry Relations and frequently speaks to lawyers and bar associations. Dan has been mentioned, featured, or published in The ABA Journal, Law Practice Today, Law Technology News, NWLawyer, Above the Law and other legal industry press. In 2015 he was named to the FastCase 50 – a group of entrepreneurs, innovators, and trailblazers in the legal profession – and in 2014 Dan was honored with the Washington State Bar Association President's Award for his participation in and advocacy of legal technology projects locally and nationally. Find him on Twitter at @rightbrainlaw.

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